

Andy Tran

for Hanson

Black bodies buried beneath this fresh and Black soil
can no longer speak. and their names are jotted down,
but their stories haven't been told. in the courtyard,
by the fountain, pen in hand, rear in chair, i ponder
about whether i have the right to write and tell
the stories of those bodies. i breathe in the quiet
and chill air, hoping Hanson, the enslaved cook,
will guide my hand as i write notes on his recipes
onto my crumpled pad. the woodlawn estate looms
over me and it scares and excites my imagination
when my fingers crack and tremble from dragging
my black pen across the white pages. the Black ink
seeps into the white notepad, blotting out the plainness.
i stand up and stretch my hands, i put my headphones on,
press play, and listen to "Coffee Bean" by
Travis Scott— "Feel like someone's readin'
your horoscope/some shit only me and the Lord
knows/SOS, that's for those who hear
this in morse code/Too many doors closed..."
i turn the knob and open the white door
to the woodlawn bridal suite. i sit on the couch
and check the internet for information on Hanson.
google Hanson into the search bar. click:
william cook hanson is the first name that pops up
as the first result. the rest of the results are white names
and white faces. barely anything can be found
on Hanson. the ac unit rattles and the brilliant light
from the lamp dims, as if on cue. Hanson was the cook,
which made him pertinent in the lives of the white family
who lived at the woodlawn estate. because he cooked,
created, and cultivated the food, Hanson resided in the
kitchen, meaning he slept there after he labored for hours,
baking bread in a beehive shaped oven, next to a fireplace
that burned all day, every day. there's a cook book
that features two of his recipes in a book
of over 90 recipes. this is **Hanson's recipe**
for Breakfast Biscuits: "Take a quart of dough,
add butter the size of a hen's egg, work it up
very well so as to mix the butter & dough well,
roll it out 3 or 4 times cut it in small pieces, roll them up

like an Egg, just flatten them a little with the rolling pin,
set them by a few minutes to rise, & bake them
in a slow oven.” i borrowed this recipe from *nelly
custis lewis’s housekeeping book*, which was edited
with an introduction by patricia brady schmit, to show
how many of the recipes in the book were most likely
“borrowed” from Hanson. to segue, i eat my meatball sub
and drink my orange soda. i think about food. i think
about traveling to get food. i think about food and travel.
i think about Anthony Bourdain. i think about Hanson;
i think about Anthony Bourdain. i think about Hanson;
i think about Anthony Bourdain. i think about Hanson;
i finish eating and open up the white door and walk
outside. on sunday, i work at the arcadia center’s farm
and maneuver a wheelbarrow around and over
the bumps and ridges of the damp grass. as rain plummets
onto the green land, i take a moment to reflect, my knee
bleeding from a cut. i remember my residency week
and wander, lost in thoughts. there i am again. i sit
back in my chair and stare at the white
tarpaulin where they host the weddings. i wonder
if Hanson was married. i wonder if he had children.
i wonder if he was ever happy. i pick up my pen,
my hand shuddering, as i scribble words onto the page.
it feels strange to write about the Black bodies buried
beneath this rich and Black soil. but I want to honor
Hanson and the slaves who lived, work, and sacrificed
their hands, feet, arms, legs, eyes, faces, teeth, and minds
to build this estate. these Black men and women toiled
to create this establishment for white families while
their families lived outside in slave quarters two miles
away from the property.

tell me if i have the right
to write the stories
of those Black bodies
buried beneath
this fresh and Black soil.